

A Collaborative Approach

COMPANY BRIEF Operating as one firm with six global offices, KPF (kpf.com) is one of the world's premier architecture firms with approximately 600 staff members from 42 different countries, together speaking a collective 40 languages.

The firm's diverse portfolio comprises corporate headquarters, office buildings, hospitality, academic, medical, research, civic, museum, transportation, residential, and mixed-use projects both in the United States and abroad. More than 100 projects of the firm's completed projects are certified, or pursuing, green certification.



Marianne Kwok

An Interview with Marianne Kwok, Director, Kohn Pedersen Fox

EDITORS' NOTE Since joining KPF in 1994, Marianne Kwok has been the Senior Designer for some of the firm's most high-profile projects. Kwok received her Master of Architecture from the Harvard University Graduate School of Design and her Bachelor of Architecture from Cornell University, where she was the recipient of the Charles Goodwin Sands Memorial Silver Medal.

What makes KPF such a special firm?

It's the people who work here and because of them, there is so much intelligence and energy that appeals to the amazing set of clients we have. We're able to realize great work because of that combination.

Do designers generally work in a certain category or is it across all platforms?

There isn't a group of people who work on the same type of projects over and over. The commonality of what we all do is that we're really interested in global cities and trying to solve problems.

Over half of the world's population now lives in cities, and while there are many opportunities, there are also issues. What we bring is our interest in solving those problems, trying to think about density and transportation needs, a sustainable environment, how to get a balance of open-space greenery, and how people walk on the streets of a denser city. Those issues permeate every kind of work we do, be it office spaces, hotels, residential, or retail.

Our specialty is being able to do big, mixed-use projects that combine all of these elements while making cities more livable and more beautiful.

You're involved in some of the work around Hudson Yards. How do you see the impact Hudson Yards will have on the city?

It's really creating a new neighborhood in New York. Throughout the history of Manhattan, that area has always been transportation-related and a black hole that people always went around.

Hudson Yards knits the fabric of the city together. It's wonderful that we have the High Line going around it and we are adjacent to Hudson River Park. There's the new Hudson Boulevard Park where the number 7 train station is as well.

The transportation enables a lot of area to be built and to really make a neighborhood that has an unbelievable connection to parks, which is fantastic.

Will you talk about the strength of the business in the China market?

Working there is super exciting because there is such optimism and there is a feeling that anything is possible. Lately, there is a more measured view of development.

Are the opportunities there for women to enter the industry and to lead?

Yes, there are always opportunities. There are many societal issues that are not specific to working in architecture. There are issues for working women as they progress. A major challenge is about trying to find work/life balance for everyone with a family. ●



Hana Kassem

An Interview with Hana Kassem, Director, Kohn Pedersen Fox

EDITORS' NOTE Hana Kassem joined KPF in 2001. She is an active member of the AIA NY chapter where she serves as co-Chair of the Global Dialogues committee. She is also a Board member of the Van Alen Institute. Kassem has served as invited critic at Pratt, Parsons, RISD, Columbia University, and Yale, and as guest lecturer for Cornell University and the University of Pennsylvania. She earned her Bachelor of Fine Arts and Bachelor of Architecture from the Rhode Island School of Design.

What has made KPF so special for you and a place that you've wanted to stay all this time?

I wasn't sure that I was going to stay this long. I wanted to try to work in a very large office.

What is really fantastic about KPF, beyond the caliber of people in terms of their intelligence and talent that constantly elevates one's game, is the range of projects, in both scale and type, that we are involved in – everything from hospitality to science/research, and luxury residential to public housing, and masterplans for cities to small university buildings.

It exercises different parts of one's brain on a daily basis and that kind of stimulation is really priceless.

We also have a wide reach worldwide, which is important to me. I grew up in a very international environment, and I feel like a citizen of the world. Being able to use my multicultural background and do work for projects in France, Mumbai, Brazil, Brooklyn, Shanghai, and Kentucky all in the same week is unbelievable.

Is the structure more of a collaborative team approach?

This is definitely a place where collaboration is one's greatest asset, and a place where I have learned how to listen, be receptive, and have conversations with other talented people. The best way in which we can serve our clients and obtain the best product is through sharing a vision and letting other people have ownership of that vision.

Is there still value in a pen and paper or has technology really changed how design is done?

It has changed how design is done, but there is nothing like being able to sit in a conference room with a client and pull out a paper and pen, and listen to them, and turn around that paper with your sketches on it and ask them if that's what they're thinking.

That immediacy of response is very gratifying and efficient, and is a powerful tool for an architect to have. One can't do that with the digital interface as readily.

How important is it that the diversity within the client base is mirrored within the KPF workforce?

We are in six offices worldwide, and currently, we're working in 42 countries, which are completely reflected in our demographics and in the languages spoken in the firm. It's very important for our clients to see that we are, in a way, citizens of this world, and we pay special attention in terms of mentoring and grooming the younger staff. We allow them to spend time in our other offices and travel to the projects they're working on so they understand those cultures and can produce work that is sensitive to its context. ●